



Hedgehog

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The hedgehog originates from both Europe and Africa and has in recent years gained popularity as a household pet. They are diurnal (active at dawn and dusk) creatures that spend much of their daytime hours sleeping. Hedgehogs have short spines that cover the back and crown of their head, although they are not barbed and do not cause serious injury to handlers. Coarse, dense fur covers the rest of the body. Their average life span is 5-8 years, with their weight between 250-600 grams.

Diet Suggestions

The African hedgehogs are insectivorous mammals that are very prone to obesity in captivity. Commercial hedgehog diets or dry cat kibble (Adult) should make up the bulk of the diet. In animals showing a tendency towards obesity, light or low-fat cat food should be fed. They should also be supplemented daily with chopped vegetables as well as crickets, earthworms, or meal worms. Dried fruit, hard-boiled eggs, cottage cheese, or other snacks low in fat and sugar can be used as an occasional treat. Because of their nocturnal natures and foraging capabilities these animals should be fed in the evening hours. Fresh water in a shallow ceramic dish or water bottle should be available at all times.

Handling/Behavior

Many hedgehogs can be tamed and handled without injury to the owner or pet if approached with care and patience. Start by looking and listening to the animal. Chirping, whistling and purring usually means that the hedgehog feels safe and content. A snorting, hissing or clicking animal is frightened or aggravated. Hedgehogs use body language to communicate their emotions. They will often curl into a ball and use their quills, or spines, to indicate their mood. Hedgehogs also startle easily. When they're frightened, hedgehogs will curl up into a ball with their quills erect. This helps protect the hedgehog's face and soft, vulnerable belly. Most hedgehogs slowly uncurl after a few minutes. Another way hedgehogs show fear is by erecting their spines. Typically, the spines all over the body are erect when the hedgehog is scared. If only the spines on the head are erect, this usually means the hedgehog is cautious and uncertain. When the spines lie flat on the body, the hedgehog is calm and comfortable. Start with the hedgehog held flat in the palm of the hand and slowly allow it to explore and adjust.

Your hedgehog may do a self-annointing activity called "anting." This is a normal hedgehog activity performed when confronted by a new object or smell in his environment. The hedgehog will lick the new object repeatedly until saliva is produced and he begins drooling. Then he will groom his skin and spines with the frothy saliva. This behavior may go on for minutes or last up to an hour.

Quilling - There are over 7,000 quills on a hedgehog. These quills are modified hairs and contain air chambers that make the quills light. Young hedgehogs will shed their baby quills starting at about 2 to 6 months of age. At this time, the behavior of the hedgehog may change. During quilling, the hedgehog may be rolled into a ball for long periods of time. They may hiss and may have a poor appetite. Usually, quilling takes about a month and the hedgehog will return to normal. It is acceptable to handle the hedgehog during quilling, just be careful and patient.